

2011

The Concord, 16 March 2011

Luther Seminary

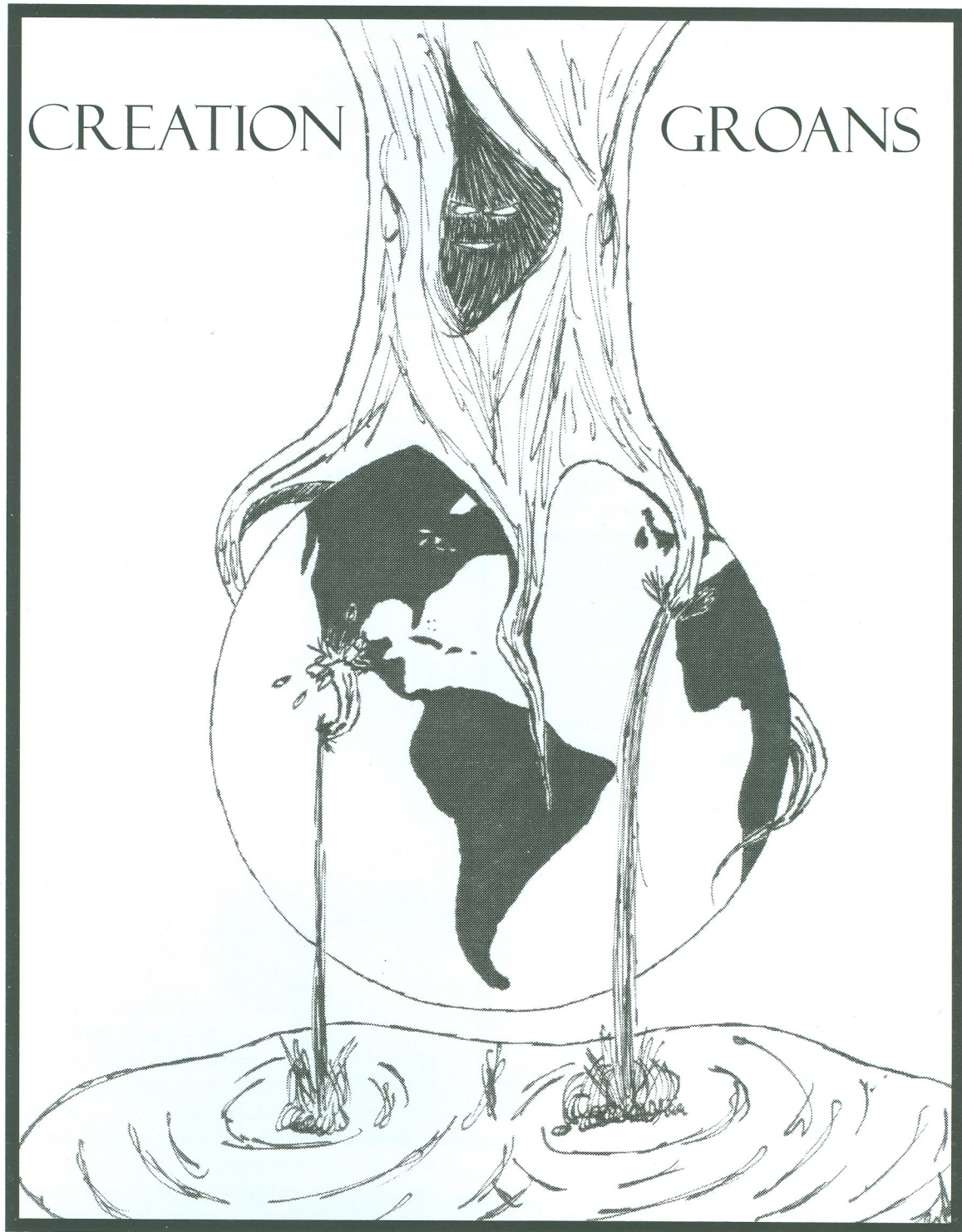
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Concord



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Letter From the Editor

By Marie Olson

Concord Co-Managing Editor

I grew up in the city. My parents both grew up on farms in Iowa, as a result my mom usually makes jokes that I am a 'city-girl,' she used to say it in a such a way that it sounded to me like she was explaining my stupidity when it came to small town, rural life. I used to resent her saying it, but I've come to a place where I kind of get it, I *am* a city-girl. That's just what I know! So perhaps it will be funny to some of you that this city-girl co-manager of the Concord newspaper is announcing an issue about the environment with special attention to rural communities. (Even though Frank is about to argue that environment is a stupid word. see pg 17)

But it is actually quite important that I, a "city-girl" place emphasis on the importance of thinking about the environment from a rural standpoint because so often around Seminary it seems that we take sides. We're either rural ministry people or urban ministry people. What this issue attempts to get at is that we simply cannot be either, we are all deeply connected and effected by the environment and most certainly by the environment's effect on agriculture. From the simple fact that Arby's is currently serving tomatoes only by request—since there was a frost in Florida which affected the tomato harvest—to the dangers of our food demands causing unsafe practices in food production in order to meet them, to the many who go hungry while we are feasting. So, while the city-folk perhaps sometimes need a wake-up call to remember how closely we rely on the agricultural communities, the reality is that rural is also not about being isolated anymore.

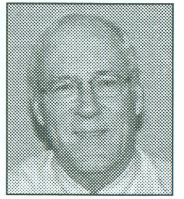
My father is a professor of Agricultural Economics at the University of Minnesota, in his recently published textbook on Farm Management in a Global Setting he writes, "The world has changed, is changing, and will continue to change. The world is much closer to us, and we to the world. In the future, farmers will have to consider world events and world markets much more than they have in the past. This is true whether they are involved directly in international trade or marketing to local consumers." Our world is shrinking, and our actions and demands can thereby affect the whole world. Our food is part of creation, we are part of creation, and our processes for maintaining our lifestyles draw upon creation; and we are called to care for creation. In this issue, we have many thought-provoking articles on not only the ways we are caring for creation but also how we view creation and our place in it.

Letters from Paul

Stewards of the Soil

By Paul Harrington

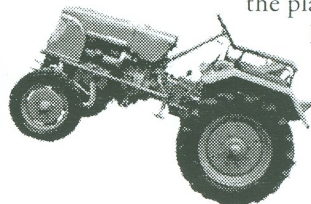
Seminary Pastor



I begin today with a disclaimer. I have never lived on a farm nor have I lived in rural America. I was born and raised a "city slicker" in five major metropolitan cities. But I was fortunate enough to marry into a large farm family and, from them, I have learned a lot about the land and these good "people of the soil."

My wife's grandfather went courting as a young man with a horse and buggy and lived to see men land on the moon. Probably no other generation in history has seen such technological advancements in one lifetime. My father-in-law started out as a young man harvesting corn by hand and before he retired he was driving one of those monster combines that allowed him to harvest up to 100 or more acres a day. One of my brothers-in-law, now farms about 2,000 acres near Welcome, MN. This year he averaged over 200 bushels of corn per acre. One generation earlier, farmers would have been happy with 50 bushels an acre. The American farmer, with the help of some chemists and horticulturists and agronomists, is now three to four times more productive than just one generation ago. I read some years ago that the American farmer is capable of feeding up to 80 or 90 people. A Russian farmer on average was feeding only about 18 people. The average farmer worldwide was feeding only about 5 or 6 people.

Another article I read not long ago stated that if all the corn harvested in America in a recent year was placed in those jumbo railroad hopper cars, that train would run from L.A. to New York City not once but 13 times! Obviously, American climate, soil, technology, and farming methods are among the best on the planet.



Another brother-in-law now has two of those giant wind turbines on his farm which allows him to produce electricity as well as grain and livestock. What a marvel!

So what can we say about all of this as the people of God? One, we should be forever thankful for the bounty of the land and the Lord God who makes it all possible. Never forget that the soil, the seed, the sun, and the rain are all gifts from his hand. Two, in our desire to increase productivity, may we do nothing to harm the land. Today there are some concerns about the overuse of fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides, soil erosion, and the loss of precious wetlands. And finally, to always be asking, how can this productive land continue to feed both our nation and other parts of the world where starvation and malnutrition are a tragic part of daily life.

The Psalmist (24) tells us that the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. It is his world but we are always partners with him in caring for this amazing place we call Mother earth. Let us be careful and caring stewards!

COVER ART: *Arbor Day*

Ink on Paper

Doug Johnson, MDiv Senior

My thought "Arbor Day" was Mother Nature getting her revenge. We are so reckless in how we abuse the Earth and there is little that the Earth can do in response. Species eliminated, forests burned to the ground and polluting the atmosphere are not ways to be good stewards of the Earth. It is my hope that we can be more in touch with the command that God gave us to be stewards of the Earth. God gave us this earth and we need to not neglect it and abuse it but respect and watch over it.

What Does "Fair Trade" Have to Do With Our Faith?

By Michelle de Beauchamp

MDiv Intern at Our Saviors in Owatonna, MN

"Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless." –Isaiah 10:1-2



Today we turn on the television and we are bombarded with stories from around the world about poverty, hunger, unfair wages, children being malnourished and abandoned, women being abused, an oil spill and deforestation, indigenous people being oppressed, economies tanking thereby affecting the poor and middle classes of society, unemployment, war, no access to education, small farms disappearing worldwide and the list goes on and on. It is too much to handle. We either a) feel hopeless and like there is nothing we can personally do to help, or b) don't really think about it because we are comfortable in our lives right now.

So what does this have to do with Fair Trade? For example, there is enough food in this world today to feed every person, but we still face growing numbers of people living in poverty and having no food at all. Fair trade is a way that we can help provide starving people around the world with resources to make a fair wage from a reliable source of income from the coffee/food they grow or handcrafts they produce. This can end up helping to sustain their local economy and also preserving their local handcrafts/culture that are potentially being lost with globalization and economic trends. In addition, the people who benefit the most from Fair Trade are women and their children. When we support Fair Trade we can help improve women/children's rights around the world, help small businesses become a reality, help people get the fair price for their product, and help the environment with the use of local natural resources for handcrafts. This eventually helps people have access to education in a trade/skill and maybe even schooling. This is a way we can live out the kingdom of God in our lives, just by considering what it is we consume and where it comes from.

At my internship site this year at Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Owatonna, Minnesota the social ministry committee hosted its first Lutheran World Relief (LWR) Christmas fair trade fair. The committee thought that since the once-a-month LWR coffee sales at church went well it was time to do a handcraft sale. It was more of a success than anything we could have imagined. From just a little pre-education about fair trade—how it helps the environment and people—the congregants understood what it was about. We sold almost all the goods in 45 minutes between services, and constantly we heard about how wonderful it was that these gifts for family/friends had such a deeper meaning.

All it takes is making a few conscious choices about what we buy.

A God-given Responsibility

By Gemechis Feyisa

MA Senior



In traditional Africa, nature is closely associated with human beings not only as a provider of means for physical sustenance, but is also revered for its sacredly endowed agency of pronouncing divine blessings or judgment. As John S. Mbiti says, animals, plants, land, rain and other natural objects and phenomena describe man's environment, and African peoples incorporate this environment into their deeply religious perception of the universe. However, due to the growing need for arable land, firewood and charcoal as a source of energy, deforestation is currently becoming a big problem in Ethiopia adversely impacting climatic balance, wildlife and in general threatening life as a whole.

The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is responding to this challenge through its Commission for Development and Social Service (DASSC) and its congregations. As a Church committed to holistic mission, the EECMY is actively involved in a comprehensive social and development services in addition to its primary mandate of proclaiming the Gospel to all God's creation. The DASSC has as one of its core values preservation and promotion of Christian love and care for the humanity and the creation as a whole. Natural resource management and environmental protection is also the top priority in the list of its program priorities. The Church understands that the task of caring for the environment is a God-given responsibility to human beings right from the creation. This can be understood from the address of the EECMY president, Rev. Dr. Wakesyoum Idosa, to the seminar summoned on the topic of "Response to Climatic change," which was organized by the collaboration of the EECMY General Secretary office and the British Council on August 5, 2010, in which he asserted that the EECMY believes that all human beings have the obligation to develop, to nurture, to keep and protect the earth on which they live from natural and man-made disasters.

These are being effected through huge integrated environmental protection and food security projects run by the DASSC in many areas in the country, through the advocacy of the EECMY on several occasions in support of measures to be taken to regulate environment to make it a safe place for living, and through the EECMY congregations' participation in reforestation, creating awareness among its members on the proper use and conservation of natural resources and so on.

Even though the church's engagement is encouraging, the intensity of the problem still calls for extraordinary efforts for which the EECMY has to respond with newer insights and consciousness, as well as stronger motives for action based on her perceived intrinsic value of the natural environment to God and her responsibility to glorify God by how she cares for creation.

"all human beings have the obligation to develop, to nurture, to keep and protect the earth"

The Cassock Experiment

By Beau Nelson

MDiv Senior

According to a popular internet encyclopedia up until the second half of the 20th century a long black dress or coat, called a cassock, was worn as the normal everyday clothing of the clergy (including Lutherans) in many countries around the world. However, fashion changed and it was replaced by the suit coat and clerical collar. In the West, cassocks are generally only worn in worship (usually with a surplice), though they technically are not a liturgical vestment.

Back in November, I decided to do an experiment. I wondered how I would feel wearing this traditional garment, and how the seminary community would react to something like that. I really had no idea what the outcome would be, but was willing to take the plunge (with the permission of my lovely wife, Lydia).

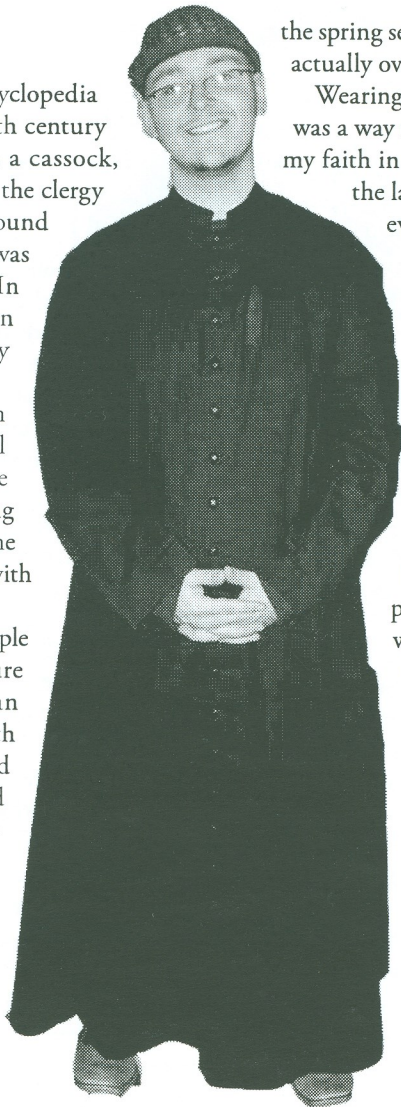
The first few days went fairly well. Many people asked me about it, but I really wasn't too sure what to say, other than the fact that it was an experiment. Most people seemed satisfied with that answer. Not to my surprise, I also received many strange looks. And one person even said to me, "Nice skirt." But I corrected him: "It's a dress!"

As time passed, I had more conversations, more reflections, and a couple of strong critics. There were even a couple of days where I thought the experiment was over, but I decided I needed to continue. When

the spring semester started, I realized that the experiment itself was actually over, but the cassock remained.

Wearing the cassock had become for me a spiritual discipline. It was a way for the Holy Spirit to continue to form and strengthen my faith in a way that no other practice had been able to. Just in the last few months, God has become more real to me than ever before, and I know that the cassock has something to do with that.

Besides having contributed to me personally, wearing my faith "on my sleeve", as it were, it has shown me another dimension of what it means to be a "missional leader." As more and more people are leaving the church, the priesthood of all believers is getting smaller and smaller. None of us, especially pastors, can afford to be anonymous Christians any longer. Wearing "the uniform", whether it is a clergy shirt, a cassock, or camel's hair with a leather belt, could potentially make the statement that God is present in this community. Professor Lois Farag shared with me that many people throughout her years as a Coptic nun have come up to her and have asked for prayers or just to listen, simply because she was wearing her habit (nun outfit).

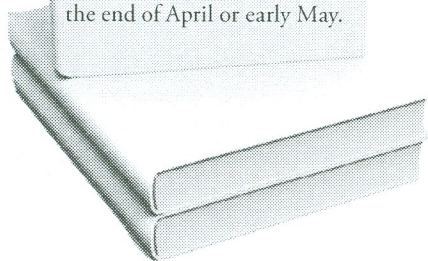


"Wearing the cassock had become for me a spiritual discipline."

THE BOOKSTORE WALL

"Have you signed the bookstore wall? You sign it. We'll photograph it. People with big sledgehammers will tear it down."

The wall needs to be signed by the end of April or early May.



Concord

concord@luthersem.edu • (651) 641-3260
2481 Como Ave. • St. Paul, Minn. 55108

Marie Olson—Co-Managing Editor
Frank Johnson—Co-Managing Editor
Liz Rossing—Layout Editor
Jonathan Davis—Contributing Editor
Micah Pearson—Contributing Editor

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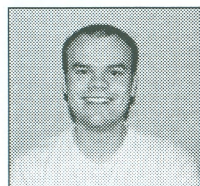
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Climate Change

By Andrew Twiton

MDiv Junior



Skepticism about climate change continues to rise in the United States. According to Gallup, there's been an 11% increase just between 2008 and 2010 among those in the U.S. who believe the

effects of global warming will never happen or will not happen in their lifetime. Climate change legislation in the U.S. Congress has stalled or died, and the U.N. conferences in Copenhagen and Cancun made limited progress. The conversation, in the U.S. especially, seems stuck.

Setting aside that debate as much as possible for now, I'd like to start from a different angle. Back in the fall of 2009, I met Pastor Mawien Ariik, the leader of Zion Lutheran's Sudanese community in Anoka, MN. While speaking about the challenges facing Sudan, Pastor Ariik talked about the shortened rainy season that has contributed to a decline in crop yields. He attributed this to climate change. Further south, in Malawi, a rainfall season that used to be five months minimum hasn't been reaching four months. These countries are already adapting to a changing climate. While the problem of climate change has primarily come from the richer countries of the world, it is the poorer countries that are already experiencing life-changing consequences.

It's for reasons and examples such as these that you'll find increasing urgency and consensus about addressing the effects of climate change among international relief, development, and advocacy organizations in the United States. InterAction, the largest alliance of U.S.-based non-governmental organizations addressing global poverty, claims they are already seeing effects from climate change that could "undo two decades of progress against poverty." Bread for the World, a Christian advocacy organization working to end hunger, echoed this concern in their 2011 Hunger Report. They state it very strongly: "Putting strategies in place to contain climate change is critical to the success of any hunger and malnutrition initiative." If we in the U.S. doubt or are not moved by the consensus of scientists, perhaps stories from farmers and the urgency of organizations that work with them will reach us in a way that leads to action.

When I asked Bread for the World's Field Organizer for Minnesota, David Maus, about what Luther students could do, he stressed advocacy. He said, "In addition to individual lifestyle choices, we also need to be taking action collectively to address public policies and making sure as a nation that our foreign aid benefits those most vulnerable to climate change." As skepticism rises and conversations stop, I pray we will be quick to listen to our neighbors across the world and respond as they tell us about their changing realities.

Toward a Green Seminary

By Ellen Elhard

Senior Director of Facilities and Auxiliary Services



With a long standing commitment to stewardship, Luther Seminary walks the talk when it comes to the environment. As a community we made the decision to purchase only Fair Trade coffee and drink from reusable or renewable cups. That alone is an accomplishment for a group of three or more!

Throughout the campus lights have been switched to fluorescent fixtures; we are currently accepting proposals for the next generation of energy efficient lighting for the Chapel. The furnaces and A/C unit in the Burnved Apartments were replaced in 2007 & 2008 with high efficiency units. We monitor all heating and air systems in Northwestern Hall and the Olson Campus Center via a web based program and are looking to expand that system into Bockman and Gullixson as renovations make it possible.

In addition, the Dining Service offers paper take-out trays and paper cups, as opposed to styrofoam, knowing the increased cost will help with the future. Cleaning products used by custodial services are low impact, and where possible, green. Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) are a concern with paints, glues, sealants and floorcoverings. Our maintenance department and suppliers are aware of Luther Seminary's commitment to environmental stewardship and keep us supplied with low VOC products.

Our recycling program is supported by every department on campus and made financially possible by the City of Saint Paul's commitment to picking up cans, bottles, plastic and paper at no cost to the institution. At the bookstore, we recycle and reuse. All paper and cardboard is flattened and paper recycled. Paper bags are brought in by customers and reused by future customers for their purchased items.

This summer we start the renovation of Olson Campus Center. Throughout the processes of concept, drafting, designing and redesigning, we and the architects have held to a focus on Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification. The LEED green building certification program encourages and accelerates global adoption of sustainable green buildings and development practices through a suite of rating systems that recognize projects that implement strategies for better environmental and health performance. Even for renovations, the expectations are high and the compensation, or return on investments (ROI), must be calculable. The checklist to meet LEED certification is extensive and includes multiple items within each of the following area: Sustainable Sites, Water Efficiency, Energy and Atmosphere, Materials and Resources, Indoor Environmental Quality, Innovation in Operations and Regional Priorities.

The lists go on and I would be glad to share the LEED manual and the opportunities we have for stewardship with anyone interested. You can also go on-line at www.usgbc.org for more information.

In addition, after the Campus Center project is complete, we have asked the architects to start research on solar power and its sustainability in our northern climate. As a community we are moving to prepare a better environment than we inherited and to leave this place more sustainable than we found it.

Pulled from the Ashes

By Beth McDuffie
MA Junior



We ought to care about the environment in order to preserve the sanctity of God’s creation. As created beings, humans were not created outside or above any other aspect of creation. We are created out of and in relationship to our environment. Not only out of concern for the survival of humanity, which depends on the environment, but also out of concern for the flourishing of all life we ought to care about the environment. At the beginning of Lent, we are reminded who we are as ashes are smeared across our forehead, “By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.” (Gen. 3:19) We are our environment, through and through, as fellow created matter the environment ought to be considered as ourselves rather than an outside entity to be taken care of. Out of love for ourselves and in gratitude for life we ought to live in mutual relationship with creation constantly considering the ways in which our actions impact life as a whole.

Our lives demand the death of creation as we rely on our environment to yield food, nutrients, oxygen, etc. We ought to

care for the environment that sustains our lives out of a mutual covenant with creation in which all beings and all created matter are sacrificed for the perpetuation of new life. Our relationship with the environment that we belong to has not been one of love or care. It has been one that has robbed the environment—and created life—of vitality and removed the ability to flourish from humans and other species. Rather than a life-giving cycle of death, our relationship to the environment will be one of pure death if it continues as it is. As spring draws near in Minnesota, we witness again the cycle of being; new life that comes only from death. Through this witness, hope is offered that despite the overwhelming amount of death to the environment that we have caused, there is hope for new life to come out of it. The story of Christ, which offers a life-giving death, is a story not for humanity alone but for all creation. Our relationship with creation must honor the covenant we have been promised through Christ and foster a relationship that yields only death that calls for new life.

Through honoring the environment that we belong to, we honor the God that brought us out of it. In right relationship with creation, we are pulled from the ashes and given the opportunity to bring about flourishing of life and then returned to the ashes once again to humbly offer a place for new life amidst creation as we await the fulfillment of God’s promises.

Talking Trash

By Doug Johnson
MDiv Senior

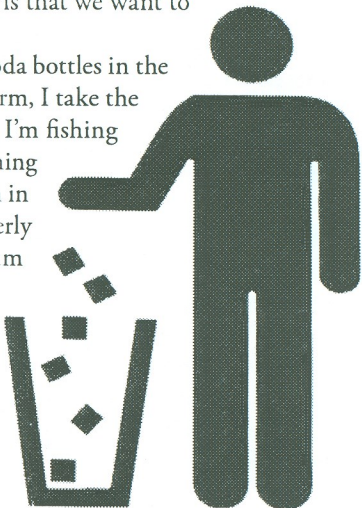


It’s amazing what we retain from our childhood. Favorite colors. Cherished memories of family travels to new locations. That one stuffed animal that is more grime than fluff. Yes, I have to say that my growing up in Southern California greatly influenced how I see and view the world, especially in regards to stewardship of the earth. When I tell people that I am from Southern California they, almost always, automatically assume that I am from Los Angeles. The truth is that I spent more time looking at cows and barbed wire fences than I did looking at taxis and skyscrapers. And maybe because of the location that I grew up, I heard quite a bit about how to be good caretakers of the land. For as long as I can remember, I was taught the three R’s of Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle. I remember watching cartoons about how fun it was to act responsibly for the environment. I remember getting t-shirts, lunch boxes, and free pizza coupons at Pizza Hut for collecting bottles and cans to be recycled. But what I wasn’t told was how this would influence how I view my responsibility in being a good steward of the earth as I feel like I have been commanded.

Here I am, no longer a child, but those lessons from childhood stick with me. When I am out camping with my parents and I see old beer cans or Gatorade bottles sitting out around the campsite, faded from long days in the elements, my heart sinks. When I’m fishing and I see old bait containers next to long and tangled webs

of old line, I feel disappointment in my fellow outdoorsmen. When I was running on the trails in Vancouver, WA while on internship and I would see discarded candy wrappers and soda cans, I shook my head in disgust. And when I have these reactions I think, why does it matter to me? The answer is that this earth is not simply mine to trash, nor is it anyone’s to destroy but to uphold and preserve. I have these reactions because I take to heart the fact that we are to be stewards of the earth. When God tells the man and the woman at the end of chapter one of Genesis to “fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the seas and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth” God wasn’t talking about doing whatever it is that we want to do but to take care of it.

And so when I see those soda bottles in the trash can of the lounge of the dorm, I take the time to recycle them. Or when I’m fishing and I see empty bait cans and fishing line I pick them up and put them in my creel or my pocket to properly dispose of them. Or when I am breaking down camp, I pick up all the trash at the site, not just my own. And it might not save the earth from pollution or littering, but I feel like I am doing what I can to be a good steward of the earth.



Thank Goodness for Rural Ministry

By Jeanette Bidne
MDiv Senior



I'm a pretty cheery person, but one way to get under my skin is when people toss stereotypes around. When people start their conversation about calls to congregations with, "I'm open to pretty much everything, except rural..." I get a little agitated; I feel sad about what they are missing. Often, their reasoning goes like this: "Everybody knows everybody's business!" "You have to drive to get anywhere!" "You can never be anonymous!"

My response to these remarks? Yes and thank goodness! I am proud to say that I would not be at seminary were it not for these very reasons. I grew up on a farm in rural southeastern Minnesota. Are you picturing a little white church with stained-glass windows plopped in the middle of a corn field? Welcome to my home congregation, Trinity Lutheran Church of Kiester, part of a two-point parish that has shaped and formed my faith.

In rural areas, "everybody knows everybody's business" may be true. But I have seen this be a blessing. For example, when a family member fell ill, it was this very fact that gathered the tractors and combines of congregation members in order to harvest the last fields of our corn before winter. Would my family have asked for this help? No, but the relief and joy of that harvest was a gift from this community.

Gifts from rural ministry come in unexpected places. If you ever come to visit Trinity, you will drive on gravel. Geographically, the church is in Iowa but on paper it is in Minnesota. Are you lost yet? As part of a two-point parish, I rode 15 minutes, one way, in the passenger seat of my pastor's mini-van to get to confirmation class which was held in the church basement. While we were driving, I asked questions about confirmation, about what it was like to be a pastor, and big questions about God. These car conversations sparked my interest in ministry. It is amazing where ministry happens. When the church structure sits vacant most of the week that means ministry is happening outside the church walls!

Wishing to be anonymous? I am in no way anonymous in my home congregation or community. Members of Trinity Lutheran Church know who I am. They know that I am in seminary and support me in indescribable ways. It was members of this congregation that boosted me into a pulpit while I was still in high school. They sent me to organ camp when they were in need of a substitute organist and knew I was willing. They let me shuffle through records in the church safe for projects and they even happily answer interview questions for Exercises in Biblical Theology class. The list goes on and on.

I am convinced that there are faithful people wherever one goes. This year I have been worshipping in Minneapolis, my teaching parish was at Macalester College, and I completed internship in the suburbs of Kansas City. Yet, nothing has shown the koinonia of God more clearly than my upbringing and experience of rural ministry. Stereotypes simply can't describe rural ministry. I take with me into ministry the gifts and support Trinity has first given me. I hope for an opportunity to give in a rural ministry setting. Take the chance to experience it too, if you can. If not, I hope you can still appreciate it. That would make me happy.

Good News Proclaimed Everywhere

By Denise Fossen
MDiv Middler



Church in the country. What does this look like? What is rural? I do not claim to be an expert in rural ministry though it has been a part of my life. My husband grew up on a western Minnesota farm with the nearest town fourteen miles away. During the summer we still attend that

rural country church that is surrounded by crops and when we are there, we are invited to participate in their ministry. I was raised in a small town with a population of 600. My grandparents lived six miles from town and whom we visited at least weekly were crop and dairy farmers. The town churches were a mixed congregation of farmers, local business owners, and workers. So while I'm not an expert, I have been and continue to be involved in this ministry, at least on a limited basis.

Within my experience of rural life, I would like to share some impressions that I have gleaned from interviewing many rural Minnesota sites for internship placement. What a variety there is in rural ministry! Some embrace, at least tentatively, their neighbors; some are trying to figure out how to adapt from their founding immigrant heritage; some are comfortable with who they are right now. All are *doing* ministry wherever they are within and beyond their communities.

"The Spirit gusts across the prairies ... just as it blows through the towns and cities."

Many rural churches have partnership congregations around the world. Many rural churches are seeing the

world locally as immigrants move to their communities. There appears to be tentativeness to inviting the new neighbor to worship yet these communities care for their neighbors through practical applications of donations to food pantries and advocacy on social justice issues. Many congregations support the ELCA missions of the larger church including Haiti earthquake relief, mosquito nets to Africa, and some even send farmers to Africa. Benevolence giving is important and consistent.

Rural ministry, like any other contextual ministry, is lead by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit gusts across the prairies, lakes, and forests just as it blows through the towns and cities. We cannot control the Spirit and box it into only urban and suburban ministry but ministry is anywhere a gathering of people come to hear God's Word proclaimed. The people in rural Minnesota at least, want to hear that Good News declared.

This ministry is no different than any other ministry at its core: communities of joys and sorrows; and people in need, people with hurts, people born and people dying, people hungering for a word of grace. The only thing that is different is the location.

From a Toxic to a Happy Exchange: Theological Musings on the Environmental Crisis

By Dr. Guillermo Hansen
Associate Professor of Systematic Theology



Environmental crisis? Climate change? Humm...bad news and good news. Let's start with the bad. Social geographer Jared Diamond has extensively studied how societies, civilizations and cultures are most often unwilling to deal radically with impending environmental crises. Usually, they wait and then choose short-term strategies that create the illusion of dealing effectively with a problem. It is unrealistic to think that people would spontaneously change their work patterns, technology, consumption and methods of producing and exchanging goods and services, in anticipation of a crisis whose results are unknown. Instead, societies are usually forced to change.

Now the good news. Change is already occurring, our environment is rapidly mutating, and we more or less know not only why this is happening, but also the grim costs of a disproportionate change. An overwhelming majority of scientists concur that we are facing a major climate change, and that the homeostatic-dynamical system that both is an expression and sustainer of life on this planet seems to be reaching a tipping point. Needless to say, if this summit is actually reached, we can say goodbye to our incredible evolutionary journey. But, why is this good news? Or rather, can we perceive any good news enfolded, wrapped, hidden within the bad?

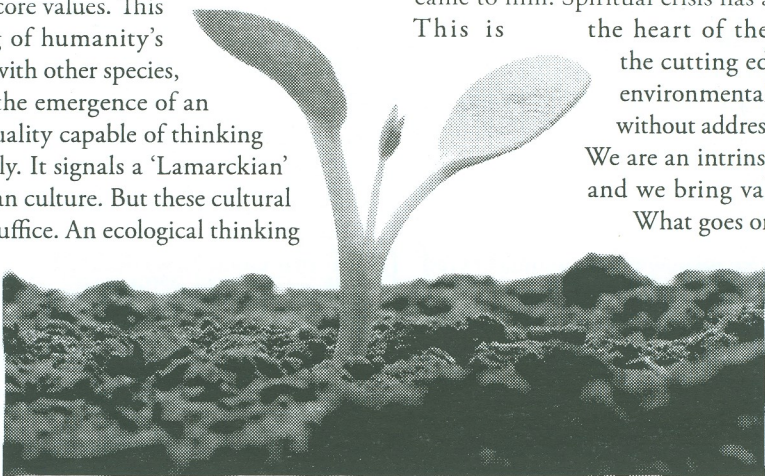
It seems that our survival instincts are kicking in. The pace and seriousness of these changes is spawning new global trends reflecting different strategies of 'adaptation'. Of course, the outcomes of these instincts may be volatile. On the one hand we have wars contending for fewer resources, massive migrations, polarizations between rich islands and seas of poverty. Not a very promising horizon, especially if we speak of 7 billion people! But on the other hand, we are also witnessing the flourishing of another aspect of humanity, its flexible 'mind' and imagination. For example, the increasing diffusion of environmental thinking around the world is the tip of a major cultural change centered in long-term planning and a willingness to reconsider core values. This signifies a radical re-thinking of humanity's place in the planet, its relations with other species, sustainable development, and the emergence of an ecological worldview and spirituality capable of thinking systemically and not just linearly. It signals a 'Lamarckian' change in the 'software' of human culture. But these cultural changes by themselves will not suffice. An ecological thinking and spirituality requires political teeth. Here is where a Lutheran spirituality dribbles in, a spirituality able to integrate the self, the political and nature as enfolded by an inexhaustible –and

patient– God. Humanity, of course, is unpredictable, yet also sensitive to the surroundings and influenced by small fluctuations –like the environment itself. The point is, the environmental crisis forces us to think, feel and live in a more holistic and caring mode; there is no other 'choice' if we are to continue on living. Our will is bounded; we have reached an ominous frontier. Are we going to jump into the abyss, as many conservative pundits seem to recommend with their crypto-Calvinistic trope of deregulations? This whole situation is analogous to what the Lutheran tradition refers to as Law. An existence under the Law is when love is exacted from us, a demand that limits us as we interact with our immediate environment, i.e., neighbors and nature. Love is not something that we are willing to offer spontaneously, yet life cannot flourish without it. This, however, reveals the uneasiness of life, for the more we 'feel' the pressure of these limits, the more it seems we want to transgress them. Therein lays the crux of a judgment revealing our out-of-whackness, our sin as a short-circuiting of God's love. It is as though our 'hearts' were locked unidirectionally with a subsystem that disparages the whole. Alas! Our 'environmental' conundrum is already contained in Luther's explanation of the first article in his Large Catechism, as he contrasts the trust in God vis-à-vis greed and possessions. These signify the twisted 'order' of idols, a 'love' that is unbounded and therefore permuting into a closed system of desires dislodged from God's unfolding. This is death. Faith, on the other hand, is a new order that gives rise to relational wholes, a system that transcends the sum of its parts, a kenotic existence. After all, we confess and worship God as Father, Son and Spirit, a relational 'system' that relinquishes its soliloquy in order to become a real dialogical flow.

Our environmental crisis, therefore, is also a human and spiritual one. There is a judgment going on in our lives as individuals and as a species. We have reached an ultimate frontier. There is no other place left to export our 'shir' –an eloquent philosophical expression well expounded by Slavoj Zizek; our environment has become our latrine, intoxicated by our inordinate exchange. Ah! Luther knew about latrines (cloaca): it was near one that the notion of a 'happy exchange' came to him! Spiritual crisis has always had to do with exchanges. This is

the heart of the Christian proclamation, and the cutting edge for the church's mission. No environmental crisis will be adequately tackled without addressing head-on our spiritual malaise. We are an intrinsic dimension of the environment, and we bring values and disvalues to the world.

What goes on with us matters. But God offers an exchange: the chimerical yet harming short-circuited selves, for a new Self in Christ; the illusion of a self-sustaining ego(s), for a relational and encompassing whole. Apart from Christ, love hurts; in



Christ, it flows without resistance.

While the ultimate crisis is a spiritual one addressed by a promise, this promise is also addressed to our immediate environment. Here lies the other dimension of a Lutheran spirituality, a spirituality that is always political. For it is grounded in the conviction that God has given us reason and calls us through institutions within which we are co-servants in the regulation of flows and exchanges. We can foster these, transform them, or screw them up. But we are responsible for the world because we cannot cease to be living creatures. It is through the economic and political flows that we as humans are called to protect the neighbor and maintain and nurture spaces for living truly. These are spaces where love is exacted as justice. But all that applies to our (human) neighbor is even more applicable to the larger environment of which we are a part. Not only because what unites us with the environment is our very existence, but also because many dimensions of this environment are like the wounded man in the ditch. Thus facing the environmental crisis is much more than just adjusting personal lifestyles, or developing pious feelings towards polar bears. It is a radical re-configuration of the human niche, namely, the economic and political networks through which we 'couple' with the environment.

As the environmental crisis picks up its pace, as our suffering human and non-human neighbors face us with a cry for justice, many will go berserk and all the more will they seek to transgress the limits signified by God's command. Do we need a list of the Madoffs, BP's, Tea Party

fans, Republican legislators, Wall Street speculators, 24/7 consumers, and countless others? To cover up the transgression by the simulacra of new scapegoats, the sum of all our fears—gays, lesbians, 'illegals', and who knows what is next—should not come as a surprise. Oh human, all too human! But let's be fair, any of us who mostly do not utter even a whimper when hands are raised against God's creation, are also transgressing the Law. We are not innocent but all sailing in the same ship of fools. But our ship is facing now a major crisis, a critical turning point. Has idiocy taken hold of us, like a narcotic aroma arising from the foam of disaster? It is time to discern where and how each of us stands. Some, we know, are completely oblivious, having dinner on a deck that is already unraveling. Others will be too drunk—or too high—to be at the moment of any assistance. A few will keep their eyes wide shut, too scared to look the devil in the eyes. And the more vociferous will utter senseless jeremiads in the name of a God that has nothing better to do than to destroy in one second what has taken fifteen billion years. Yet there are others that perhaps moved by fear, or by just simple human decency, or those who heed to an inner moral urge, or had come to God through ways that we still don't comprehend, stand by a critical few—a growing critical mass—who have come to understand that all is a matter of unconditional love. They know, not because they are better, but because they hear someone say, "Look, I make all things new!" As a small token, through this motley crew among whom a new understanding dawns, we have a glimpse of a God who is indeed faithful.

A Korean Perspective on Environmental Engagement of the Church

By Yoseob Song
MTh



My perspective on the environmental issue is by and large based on my experience within the context of the PROK (Presbyterian Church in Republic of Korea). The environmental movement in Korea had its earliest beginnings in the ecological ethics of Minjung theology in the

1970s. Various environmental discussions in each field of theological study were developed in the late 1980s and 1990s. The Christianity and Social Problem Institute, which was established by professors dismissed for criticizing the political dictatorship, and the Wind and Water Institute of Korea Dialogue Academy were forerunners in taking initiatives in these discussions. It is not going too far to say that the environmental discussion has been led by the scholars and Pastors of the PROK in Korea.

The PROK initiated this focus by adopting the resolution of JPIC (Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation) World Forum and declaring a "Statement for the Environment" in 1990. It also undertook a life recovery movement entitled "the Fifth Wave" in 1993. Recently, the PROK established a headquarters for the ecological movement for the purpose of upholding the environmental awareness of the church and the laity.

In the PROK most of the environmental movements have been led by the Woman Association of the Church since the 1980s. Under the name of "Movement for Creation of Culture of Life", it conducted the "Save Water" campaign and ran a life research team which published a guidebook for that movement. Finally, it established an environmental course for training leadership. As part of the "Love Water Movement," it also distributed pamphlets and stickers in public spheres all over the country.

Additionally, the name of Minjung Church Association was changed into "Solidarity for Life Mission" to meet the ecological demands of the times. This association started with the aim of faith community for poor and alienated people—minjung. Now, it has expanded its concern to create a culture for saving the lives of all creatures from ecological crisis. Subsequently, challenging government's current policy in developing the four major rivers, it is attempting to mobilize prayer meetings and fastings during Lent in ecumenical cooperation with other faith communities.

Finally, the second annual PROK Ecological Ministry Conference was held last year. The pastors in this conference shared their ecological stewardships in various areas from contra-government activities to practices enhancing life-giving culture. Their basic argument is that church ought to be faithful to the ecological stewardship, taking care of ecosystems and the dignity of all living beings in the public sphere.

Just trying to be faithful

By Mark Stenberg and Kae Evensen

Pastors at Mercy Seat in Minneapolis, MN

When we envisioned Mercy Seat Lutheran Church, we never wanted to be defined as “emergent.” We simply wanted to be grace-based theologians of the cross and deeply biblical preachers, both of which are at the core of Lutheran theology. We were saddened that the whole church growth industry was tempting many Lutherans to abandon their classic liturgy and rich theology in the name of marketing the church, essentially re-arranging the deck chairs on the sinking old ship in the name of making the whole endeavor more relevant. And so we began with one, simple gut-felt intuition: What if we could plant and grow a self-supporting new church, not by trying to be “relevant,” but through better theology, faithful liturgies, and trusting in the peculiar message of the one who bids us to die that we might be born again? We envisioned Mercy Seat as a creative response to a growing need for critical-thinking, grace-based Trinitarian Christian orthodoxy. And we bet the farm on our confidence that such a community might have its own very peculiar appeal in the urban core of Minneapolis and St. Paul.

Exactly five years after our first service, we gratefully, but humbly, announce that we are on the brink of being a self-supporting church with a passionate and committed core of members and a reputation for playfulness, artistic integrity, classic life-or-death preaching, and heartbreakingly beautiful new settings of the mass. Yes, we have almost reached the outlandish goal we set out five years ago.

These days, planting a church in the urban core is not for the faint of heart: wild attendance swings, key people moving away for a better job or for grad school, and sources of funding drying up because of this big ol’ recession. Nevertheless, there are three things that make us very hopeful about our future.

1. The people love Word and Sacrament. Who knew? We hear again and again that the sermons, the carefully constructed prayers of the people, and the weekly Eucharist are a living, breathing, fleshy, bodily experience for which there is no substitute.

2. We always envisioned this “third way” beyond the worship wars and we are thrilled to see it become a reality. Because liturgy means ‘work of the people,’ we sought to avoid falling into the too-often rivaling worship ditches of either ‘traditional’ or ‘contemporary.’ Our vision was to commission original new settings of the ancient ordo, the mass of the Western church, using all kinds of musical genres. We are humbled and proud to worship to these original new settings of the mass, penned by the likes of Ben Kyle (Romantica), Jon Hermanson (The Hopefuls, Alva Star, Storyhill), and Chris Koza.

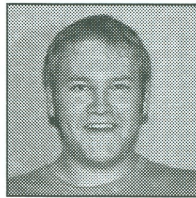
3. Let’s talk about money. No, it’s not as sexy, but it’s so very important. Our people have very recently made a huge financial commitment to Mercy Seat. We set a ridiculous goal for our 2011 pledge drive, and we made it, doubling our giving numbers for the previous year. We told people what we needed to make this work and they committed.

We are deeply grateful for the wonderful people who have found a home at Mercy Seat. And our hope is Lutherans can take confidence in their beautiful roots: creative, honest, preaching of the way of the cross, gorgeous liturgy, and the presence of the Spirit in Word and Sacrament, unfolding anew in the grace of Christ.

The Mission Table

By Chase Smith

MDiv Intern at Augustana Lutheran in Minneapolis, MN



After living most of my life in rural and suburban areas, serving my internship in an urban congregation was the last place I thought I’d end up. But here I am just a couple of blocks away from the Metrodome. My internship congregation is Augustana Lutheran Church in the

Elliot Park Neighborhood of Minneapolis. Augustana has been a landmark in this area for quite some time, as the congregation will be celebrating its 145th birthday this year. This presents a unique challenge for the community, as we’re experiencing a time of remembering the past and discerning the future.

The congregation is experiencing lean times. In a sanctuary that can potentially seat 1,000 people, we regularly worship somewhere around 50 folks. The revered building is getting a bit finicky in its old age. Staff have been cut back in recent years, and more and more parishioners lean toward the senior end of the age gradient with precious few children and young adults. Something needs to change, and very fortunately, the congregation now realizes this quite clearly and is ready to act.

Last October, representatives from the Minneapolis Area Synod and the ELCA Churchwide organization came to visit with us and conduct a ministry evaluation (think extensive RTA project). They listened to our stories and read all the figures. At the end of the weekend, they presented a list of suggestions for the community, pointedly noting that doing nothing is doing something, and not in a good way. With options ranging from closing to moving the worship space to a neighboring care facility, the congregation decided for the creative option: collaboration with the Synod and other people in forming a “mission table” by reaching out for help in the form of ideas and partnerships. Augustana wants to continue being a missional church in the city, and realizes that to do so we need to look outside of ourselves.

A “Transformation Team” was assembled and got to work immediately. The Synod was consulted, a facilitator was hired, and the team created a Request for Proposal (RFP) document called an “Invitation to Partnership.” The document presents the assets and needs of the congregation, maintaining a posture that is open to help and outside ideas. A meeting was held at ALC early this year with city and neighborhood representatives, area pastors, the Synod Bishop, and other leaders all in attendance. We discussed the document, collaborated ideas, and sent the “Invitation to Partnership” out as far as the wind will take it.

We’re still in the information gathering part of the process. A surprising number of responses are coming in, and it’s pretty exciting to be in so many future-leaning conversations. We expect to spend the spring and summer responding to these “nibbles” and will hopefully have an excellent proposal by the fall to start working toward. Though this certainly isn’t the internship I expected, it’s an incredible time to be a part of this stage in the life of a faith community.

Reflections on a Prairie Internship

By Jackie Harvestine

MDiv Senior

The environment is omnipresent in obvious and in discrete ways on the prairie. I'd like to share a few observations from my internship last year in Southwestern Minnesota.

Care of Creation: At one point I began to question the use of the weekly prayers from the worship resource *Sundays and Seasons*. Granted, it was a time saver, but repeatedly the prayers included an exhortation to take better care of the land and natural resources. This was preaching to the choir. The farmers in our midst knew that to their core and practiced it every day. The century farms scattered about the parish were evidence that not only had the environment been tended in these later years when people were paying attention to such things but also going back decades earlier when only God was watching.

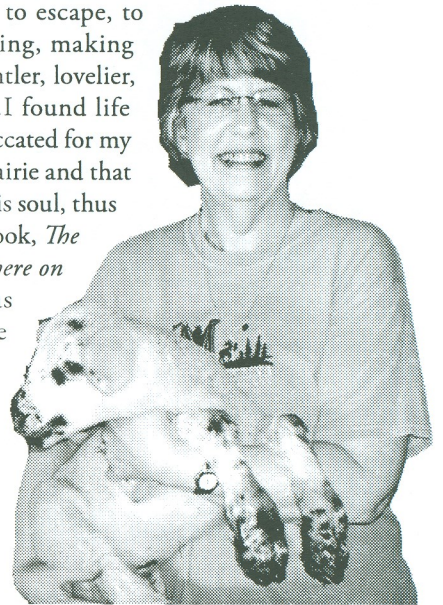
Care of each other: A young parish couple, devastated by their baby girl's diagnosis of a degenerative disease, was gifted with a mentoring couple who had recently experienced a similar situation. The hometown rallied to host a fundraiser for the family. The mentoring couple felt compelled to attend in support of these people partly from the assumption that in a town of 1,400 not that many people would turn out for such an event. They were shocked to find a line three or four deep snaking around the block. Over 600 people came that day because that's what folks in a small town do. They feel each other's pain as if it were their own. Then they care for each other in the best way they know how...by showing up. The environment of community

is tended to in small and dramatic ways.

Care of self: I lost count of the number of mornings I opened the blinds to an amazing sunrise or the multiple occasions I pulled my car to the side of the road to photograph the breathtaking view to the east. The beauty of creation meets one headlong on the prairie and reinvigorates the soul. The late Southwest Minnesota poet Bill Holm returned to his hometown on the prairie, in spite of himself, knowing self-care would be found. As he said, "God knows I tried to escape, to do the right American thing, making a middle-class life in a gentler, lovelier, more urban place...but...I found life without from-ness too desiccated for my taste." Bill was from the prairie and that sense of place was part of his soul, thus living into the title of his book, *The Heart Can Be Filled Anywhere on Earth*. His "anywhere" was Southwest Minnesota. The environment of the self can be cared for by one's place if one recognizes its power to do so.

Postscript

We are returning to the Southwest Minnesota prairie for first call!



Rural Ministry in the 21st Century

By Liz Dieseth

MDiv Middler



As we pulled up to Shalom Hill Farm in the middle of January, I remember thinking "Oh this is going to be an interesting two weeks." I am a self-proclaimed suburbanite. I have spent most of my life living in suburbs. I am not used to looking out the window and seeing nothing for miles or not having a Target within a few minutes of where I live. This cross-cultural experience helped to take this suburban girl and let her see that rural and small town ministry is a true blessing.

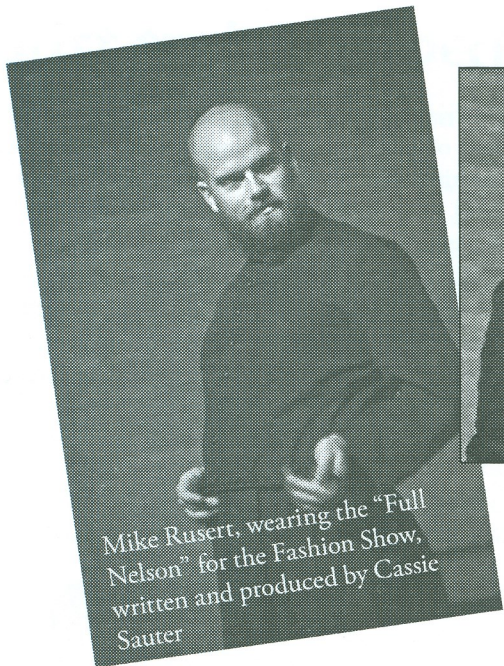
Prairie Star Ministries is a congregation containing five churches and Shalom Hill Farm; which is a retreat center. They have found a way to answer one of the greatest concerns we learned about for small town

and rural ministry: the loss of identity as a community. When small churches are no longer able to support a full-time pastor by themselves typically they are forced to make a very difficult decision. Should they combine with another congregation to make ends meet? Should they close? Should they look to a larger church for support? These are just a few of the options, but each and every one of these options mean one thing: loss of who they are as a community. These decisions are some of the hardest that churches have to face.

The churches within Prairie Star Ministries had to face some of those difficult questions. They came to a different conclusion. They decided to combine into one larger congregation where they can poll their resources. With five churches and one retreat center they are able to employ one half-time pastor, one full-time intern, and two other full-time pastors who split their time half with the congregation and half with Shalom Hill

Farm. This allows them to have the benefits of a pastoral staff. They are able to have multiple pastors with multiple gifts and strengths. This is a great thing for both the congregation and the pastors themselves. They are able to have colleagues whom they can support, challenge and with whom they can grow. The churches are able to remain in their own church buildings with their own leadership councils within the larger congregation. This, for the churches and the pastors, is the best of both worlds. Each of the churches is able to keep their own identities and the pastors are able to have a support system.

This is just one of the ways that Prairie Star Ministries is overcoming the special struggles of small town and rural ministry. My eyes were truly opened in my J-term experience to the amazing work that is being done in the small town and rural areas. This self-proclaimed suburbanite really thinks small town and rural ministry may be an amazing adventure!



Mike Rusert, wearing the "Full Nelson" for the Fashion Show, written and produced by Cassie Sauter

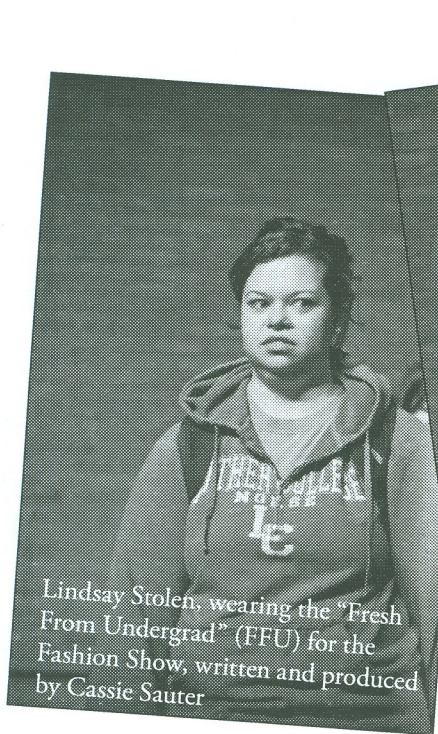


Rachel Wrenn and Rebecca Mehl, performing Loathing from *Wicked*.

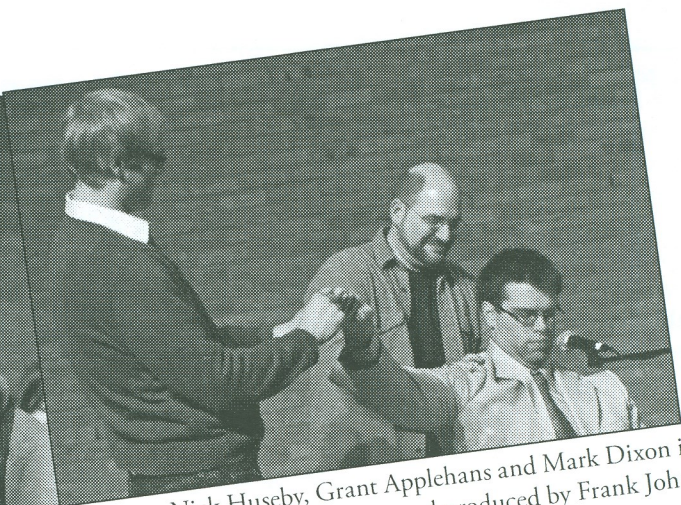


Joel Skindlov performing the Norwegian Sweater Song adapted by Joel Skindlov

6th Annual Variety Show and Auction

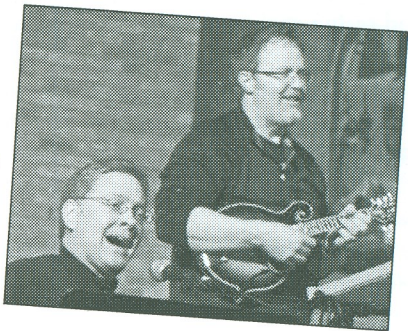


Lindsay Stolen, wearing the "Fresh From Undergrad" (FFU) for the Fashion Show, written and produced by Cassie Sauter

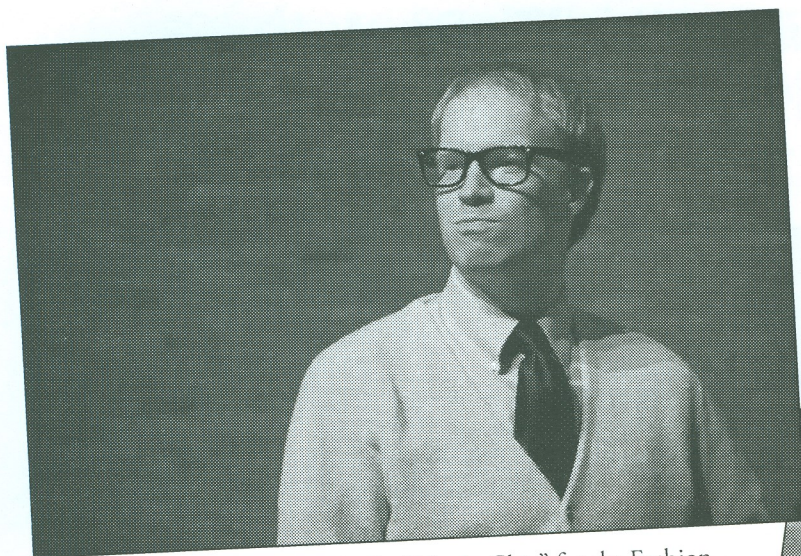


Nick Huseby, Grant Applehans and Mark Dixon in the ESPN Clergy Draft, written and produced by Frank Johnson

Rolf Jacobson and Scott Simmons, playing for the Fleshpots

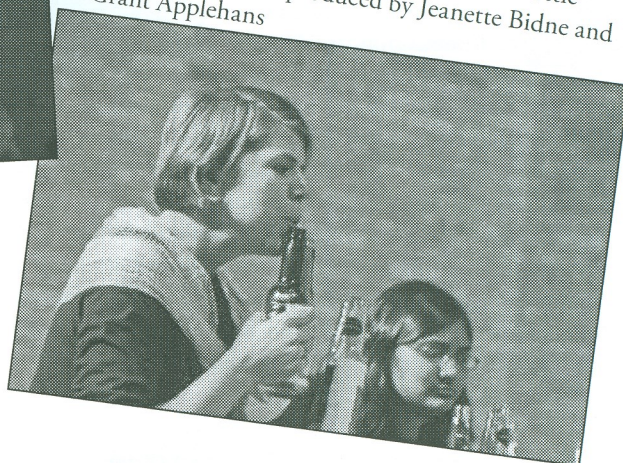


Photos courtesy of Tom Jackson.

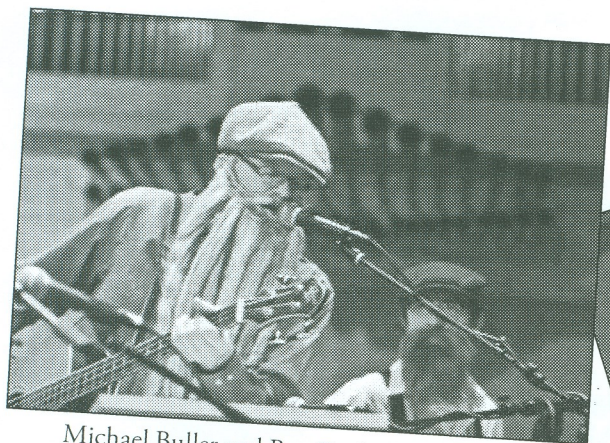


Frank Johnson, wearing the "Nerdy Chic" for the Fashion Show, written and produced by Cassie Sauter

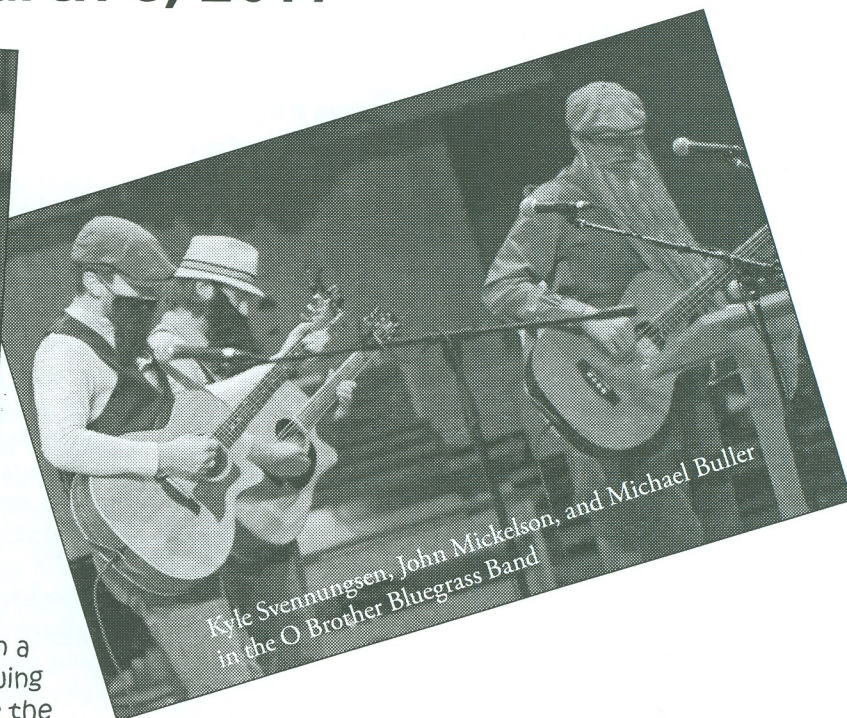
Jeanette Bidne and Katie Johnson in the Bottle Band, written and produced by Jeanette Bidne and Grant Applehans



March 8, 2011



Michael Buller and Ben Durbin in the O Brother Bluegrass Band



Kyle Svennungsen, John Mickelson, and Michael Buller in the O Brother Bluegrass Band

This year's Auction and Variety Show brought fun and excitement to the seminary campus on a cool March night. The acts were superb, showing creativity that had many proclaiming this to be the best Variety Show yet. Parody songs from music as diverse as O Brother Where Art Thou, Wicked and

Weezer made for a good mix of music and good ol' fashioned skits. The auction supported scholarships for children and youth to attend ELCA summer camps--a need that is dear to the heart of very many in the seminary community. Miss the show? Catch a replay of the event at www.luthersem.edu/auction.

What Does the Bible Have To Do With Environmentalism?

By Kathryn Schifferdecker

Assistant Professor of Old Testament



The modern conversation about environmentalism began outside the church and the church, by and large, has been a latecomer to it. As evidenced by this issue of the Concord, however, and by a plethora of books published in the last 10-15 years on the topic of theology and environmentalism, it

is an issue that is close to the hearts of many Christians.

My own interest in the intersection of faith and environmentalism began in my camp counselor days. I had the privilege many years ago of working on the staff of Christikon, a Lutheran camp in south-central Montana in the middle of the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Area. Then, as now, under the wonderful leadership of director Bob Quam, the counselors at Christikon aimed to teach campers first of all to love Jesus, to love each other, and then (because we were in the midst of such beautiful country) to care for creation.

“environmentalism... the church, by and large has been a late comer to it.”

I remember one group of campers in particular, a group of adult women from Minnesota who came out for a backpacking trip. My fellow counselor and I stopped the group for morning devotions one day beside a trout stream, the air filled with the scent of fresh pine. My friend was leading devotions that morning. I don't remember whether she read from the Bible or not. What I do remember is that she read from “The Letter of Chief Seattle,” a document for which the staff that summer had a particular fondness. Chief Seattle was a 19th century Native American leader in the Puget Sound area, and this letter, I later learned, was almost certainly not by him. Still, we thought it was eloquent:

“This we know: the earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life, he is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself....One thing we know: our God is also your God. The earth is precious to him and to harm the earth is to heap contempt on its creator.”

My friend read this letter and then started expounding on it, and pretty soon one of the women interrupted her angrily and said something like, “I worship God, not the earth! And all those conveniences we have, like washing machines and cars, they give me more time to read the Bible!”

Now, as then, I am disheartened by this woman's sharp distinction between faith and environmental stewardship. Still, we were at least

partly to blame for her reaction. We would certainly have spoken to her heart more directly if we had read from the Psalms or Genesis rather than from Chief Seattle's letter. In our youthful and misguided enthusiasm, we looked to other religious traditions instead of our own to talk about creation and God's care for it.

Unfortunately, my friend and I aren't the only ones who've made that mistake. Far from it. I recall a speaker I heard a few years ago who did much the same thing. He made Jesus into a pantheist, and ignored most biblical texts that speak of God as creator, instead focusing on Native American spirituality as a touchstone. Other works I've read on the topic of theology and the environment seem to yearn for a pristine pagan past, for a sense of being “one” with the Earth.

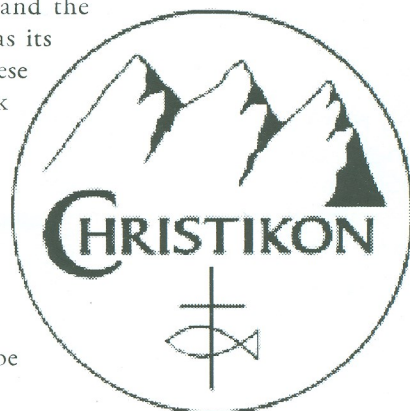
Now, I know we can learn from other religious traditions (well, maybe not paganism), but when we use them for our own purposes, we do justice neither to them nor to our own Christian proclamation. The point is this: We have rich resources in Christian Scripture and tradition for talking about creation, humanity's place in creation, and God's care for it all. Our conversation about faith and environmental stewardship is severely impoverished when we ignore those resources.

It must be said that some Christian scripture (think Gen. 1:28) has historically been used as an excuse to exploit our natural resources and do damage to the environment. I think that's because it has been badly interpreted. Scholars like our own Terry Fretheim have done us a great service by reading such texts closely and drawing out important implications for how we human beings are to “have dominion.”

There are a number of other biblical texts, not as well known as Gen. 1, that have a lot to say about creation and humanity's place in it. I've done work myself on one of those, Job 38-41, one of the most beautiful poems about creation in the Bible. The Psalms, the prophets, the New Testament epistles, Revelation, and (yes) even Leviticus – all of these texts and more have much to say about this wild, beautiful, and fragile Earth that we call home. And, of course, they have much to say about God who created and sustains it all, and Christ in whom it all holds together (Col. 1:17).

I'll be teaching a course the second half of this semester (Bible and the Environment) that has as its

aim the exploration of these biblical texts that speak of creation. We will use as our primary text the Bible, and we will also read some works by really fine biblical scholars and environmentalists. I know I'll learn a lot, and I invite anyone who's interested to be a part of the conversation.



Midwiving for Creation

By Michael Rusert

MDiv Middler



For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and suffers the pains of childbirth together until now.
-Romans 8:19-22 NASB

My sister, Samara, knows the pains of childbirth. On February 7th of this year, Sam gave birth to her second child, Hannah. When I asked her about the pain, Sam said, "It's bearable. (Pause) I mean, it's survivable." She then jokingly said, "I could tell the Lord was getting back at us (i.e. women) for our evilness." Good thing she said that and not me! Sam continued in a more serious and thoughtful tone, "When you know you're doing it for something the pain is okay.... The pain is totally different." Her perspective and experience of pain changed when she thought of the beautiful new life that was emerging from her own body.

"When you know you're doing it for something the pain is okay... the pain is totally different."

This amazing experience of childbirth, pains and all, is something we males will never be able to completely relate to (with the exception of Arnold Schwarzenegger- If you haven't seen the movie, "Junior," in which the now-governor of California plays the role of a man who with the help of science is able to give birth, do yourself a favor...don't). That being said, I find it a bit ironic that childbirth, and particularly childbirth pains show up so frequently in our scriptures which were primarily written by men. Paul, for example, speaks of labor pains multiple times, including the text cited above (see also Gal 4:19, 1 Thes 5:3). I wonder if some of the women in Paul's life were like, "Honey, you have no idea about groaning and suffering." Still, the metaphor he uses is a pregnant one. In this ecologically-minded piece of Romans, creation is experiencing what must be the longest labor ever recorded! From the time of humanity's contagious corruption until now, the whole of creation is suffering, laboring, anxiously waiting to give birth. There is no doubt that we can readily observe creation's pain and suffering. April 20th will mark the one-year anniversary of the Gulf Oil Spill, a disaster that continues to wreak havoc on eco-systems and economies. Deforestation across the globe has caused massive erosion that has washed away entire communities. Landfills continue to pile up with "stuff" that could not decompose in a million years. Meanwhile, the industrialization of our nation's food supply is becoming increasingly more unsustainable and, in my opinion, unethical. The futility and corruption of creation, when we're honest with ourselves, cannot be separated from humanity's futility and corruption. In fact, it would appear that creation's suffering is a direct result of human exploitation, and Paul's words begin to weigh on us heavily.

Paul's words also give hope to all creation—they contain the

Promise. Just as Sam was able to bare the pain in light of the promise of new life, creation too clings to the promise of birthing new creation. And guess what? We have a role to play in that birth. In our baptism, we claim to be reborn as children of God. Freed to live into what God intended humanity to be from the beginning, we can work to set creation free from its suffering. As children of God, we become like OB-GYNs or midwives who help creation deliver itself anew, fully restored, fully utile.

As creation's midwives, we work to restore creation to its original intent for the glory of God and to our own benefit. What can that look like? Well, dream big! Maybe "midwiving" could be leading the charge for community supported agriculture (CSA) gardens on Luther's spacious campus (we've got plenty of yard waste to use as compost!). Maybe it is buying more local food; eating local foods dramatically cuts down the pollution created by shipping. A walk

through the farmer's market in Lowertown of St. Paul will ensure you that God's creation (even in frozen Minnesota) is good. Maybe "midwiving" for you could be taking your bike, walking, or taking public transit to work/church/class (You don't have to worry much about ballooning gas prices when a bike is

your mode of transportation—just your carbohydrate intake. I suggest a locally produced Summit IPA to get your necessary carb fix.). Maybe "midwiving" for you is increasing your efforts to recycle. Luther has an excellent recycling program—it's up to you to make the most of it!

Green Week: March 28th to April 1st

Sponsored by the Student Council

Highlighting greening efforts already practiced at Luther Seminary

Promoting ways to be more sustainable in the future.

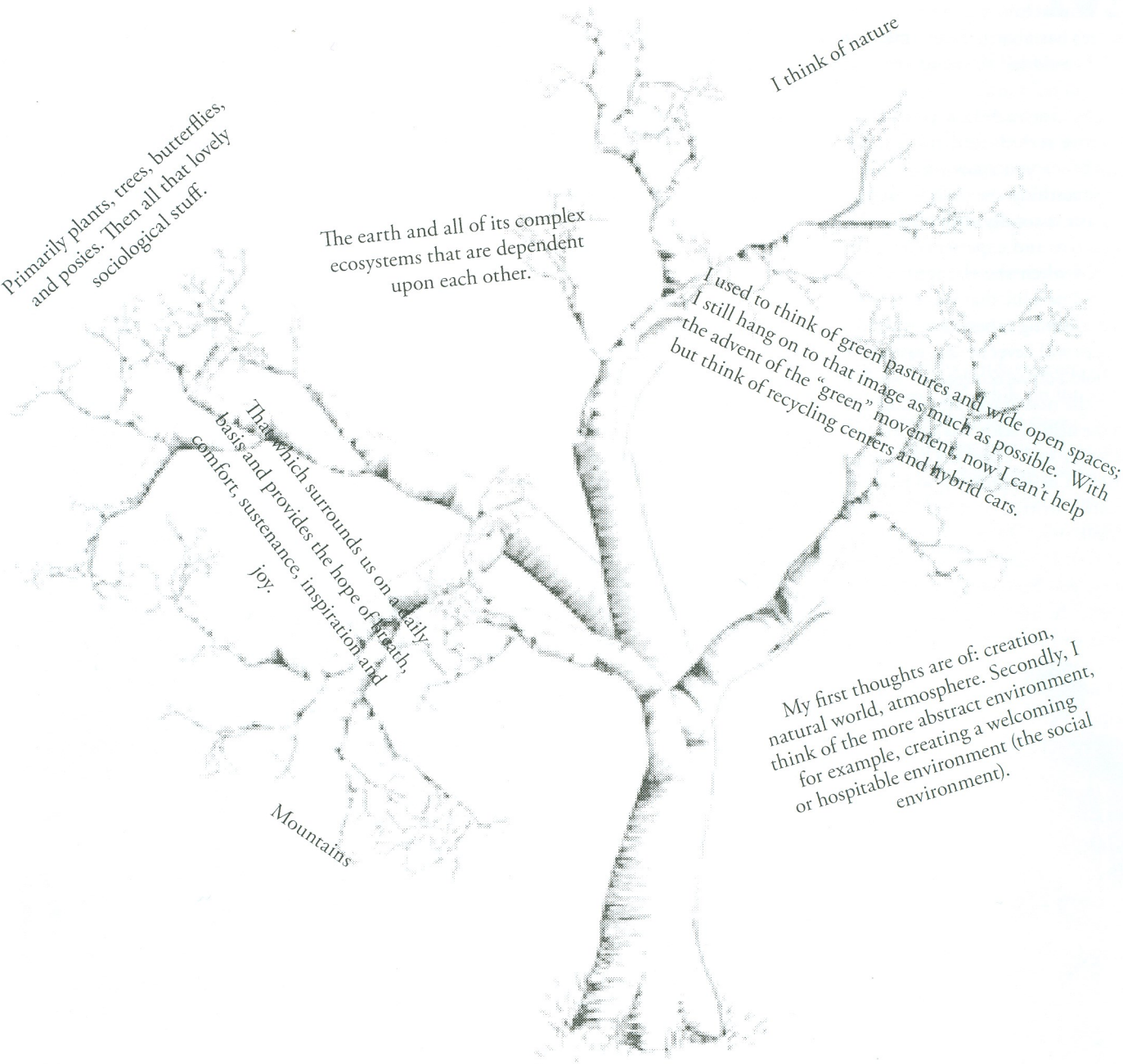
March 31: Faith and Creation:

Speaker is Dr. Calvin DeWitt from UW Madison

If interested to help, contact: Commuter Representative Michael Rusert, MA/MSM Junior Representative Erika Benson, or MDiv Junior Representative Micah Pearson

From our monthly poll,
Survey Says...

When you hear the word
"environment" what do you think of?



People of Dirt

By Frank Johnson

MDiv Senior

If the theme behind this issue is confusing the blame is mine but I'm not going to apologize. We are a people who don't understand what 'place' means, and the only way I can imagine talking about it is holistically. Rural and urban, district and state, domain and environment are all words that try to describe where we are at and the area around us, but none of them gives meaning to that place. None of them speaks the reality of relationship between its constituent parts.

This starts with the term 'environment'—perhaps the stupidest word in common practice in the English language. 'Environment' is defined commonly as one's surroundings or something along similarly simplistic lines. This leads politicians and activists to talk about 'using' it or 'saving' it, as if the environment were something outside of us to be exploited or protected. Smoke in the air enters our lungs; wildflowers, deer, pine trees, and every other living thing inevitably come back to us in calories, whether directly or indirectly through the digestion of plants and animals along the way. The idea that we are completely distinct from the creatures around us is not only nonsense, it is border-line heretical. Paul says in Romans 8 that creation is "subjected to futility" but awaits redemption—just like us, because it is us.

This isn't some smarmy, spiritual piece on the theology of nature, but—I believe—a deeply practical one. Most people—myself included—are as much aliens where we are now as any new immigrant to this country. We mostly don't know the hands that produce our food. We buy things in the store which are made in China, Indonesia or Mexico because they are cheap. "Free market" economics treats the earth as a resource rather than a place where we live, benefitting corporations who produce more and cheaper products over local businesses who understand the features and limitations of a place. These days, family farmers are some of the few who understand the inestimable value of caring for the land. For them the land is not a political cause but a necessity for the continuation of livelihoods and life itself.

As the family farm dies before our eyes, the rest of us are only a degree of separation away from the same fate. This is more a religious issue than a political one. Politics will always seek to justify itself, but Christianity is grounded quite literally in the ground. 'Adam' is from the Hebrew word for ground or dirt or plot of land, and when he and Eve are sent from the Garden of Eden it is with the directive to cultivate the ground from which he was taken (Gen 3:23). As we have distanced ourselves from toiling in the soil we have lost our identity as people of the dirt. So when we pass the Mississippi River we might remark on its muddy water as an aesthetic deficiency, but we rarely consider the top soil erosion that gives the water that tint or our implicit guilt in it. To fail to acknowledge the dirt is to forget who we are.

This is also as much an urban issue as it is rural. Not everybody can work directly with the earth, but just because our vocations now take us to places quite distant from the land does not mean we are excused from knowing our origins. Cities, in spite of their confluence

of people, often lack essential elements of community. Instead of being self-sustaining, their people rely on external services. Cities are places with specialists instead of generalists, places that expect and indeed require a level of specificity to an individual's vocation that separates us from one another. To be a specialist (for example, a pastor) is to rely on a chain of individuals, stretching back to the farmer who grows her food, the craftsman who builds her home, the automaker, mechanic, and gas station owner who build, tune and fuel her car, the stylist who cuts her hair, etc. These dependencies are largely without deep connection because each individual vocation, though dependent on one another, is involved only in a small part of life, which is more and more disconnected from the place where she lives.

I can state my belief no more clearly than this: the specialist way of life is insufficient for deeper meaning. Young people are leaving the mainline churches not because we are too traditional or too modern. We are leaving because we see what our parents and grandparents do not—that we are no longer grounded. We are leaving for churches with little theological depth, churches that cater to specialists. Instead of building community these churches offer entertainment; they are more like a sports team than a religious institution. And this is happening in settings big and small; urban, suburban, and rural.

It is a strong word of judgment against mainline churches that we offer less community than an evangelical tradition focused on individual salvation. Nonetheless, we have the opportunity now to reaffirm the centrality of place, and only in this way recreate the possibility for a healthy community. If we stop caring about our place—which is to say the people, the land, and all living things therein—we might as well give up on theological depth.

To value place means to take back the word 'salvation' from the evangelical traditions and expose its narrow view of individualism as a lie. Salvation is about health—both in the present and future—and health is never an individual state. As Wendell Berry writes, "Community—in the fullest sense: a place and all its creatures—is the smallest unit of health and to speak of the health of an isolated individual is a contradiction of terms." The smallest unit of salvation is not individual salvation; the smallest (and only) unit of salvation is Jesus Christ (I am indebted to Adam Morton, MDiv Intern, for this insight). It's time for our churches to say that Jesus Christ came for 'you', in the knowledge that 'you' are not just an individual—you are a part of a community embedded in a location. You are a person of the dirt. Stop pretending like you're not.

April Poll Question

- What denomination are you?
- What denomination were you born into?

Please log your response at: www.luthersem.edu/concord

Healthy Leaders

Upcoming Events!

Community Well-Being

American Red Cross Blood Drive! The need is constant and the gratification is instant. Give Blood!

A blood drive has been set-up for all Luther Seminary Campus on Wednesday, March 23 from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.!

To sign up go to
www.RedCrossBlood.org

Emotional Well-being

Staying a Resilient Church Leader in Changing Times forum by Verlyn D. Hemmen, Chaplain, ACPE Supervisor

Wednesday April 27 from 1:30-3 p.m.

“Well-Being” by Tom Rathe

All students who have taken the “Well-being” assessment and followed with the Parish Nurse can make their final contact beginning April 15.

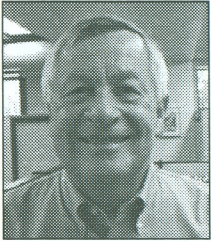
Contact Karen Treat,
ktreat@luthersem.edu.
\$50 reward upon completion.

Financial Health

It is Not Yours

By Charles Lane

Director of the
Center for Stewardship Leaders



At the heart of what the Bible has to say about the created order is, “It is not yours.” The Psalmist says it most clearly in Psalm 24:1-2, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers.” All that is around us, all that we claim to own, even our very selves, are not ours to do with as we wish. They are God’s. Our job is to manage, to care for, to steward that which God has placed in our care.

Douglas John Hall, in both *Imaging God* and *The Steward*, writes powerfully concerning the relational aspects of Genesis 1:26, “Then God said, ‘Let us make mankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea....’” To be created in the image of God establishes a relationship between us and our creator. To be given dominion establishes relationships between us and the rest of the created order.

“Our job is to manage, to care for, to steward that which God has placed in our care.”

Genesis 1:26 is not often considered a “stewardship text”, but it is perhaps the foundational stewardship text. When we understand that everything belongs to God, that God has chosen to establish a special relationship with us, and that part of this relationship is to relate to the creation as God’s representative, then we have most of what we need to understand what it means to be a steward.

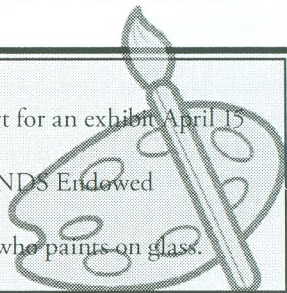
In this context, having dominion can never mean domination. The environment, the created order, does not exist for us to use for our own enrichment. Our proper place is never to view the environment as ours to do with as we wish. Genesis and the Psalmist tell us, “It is not yours.”

Our place in the created order is to steward this world on behalf of the one who created it and thought highly enough of us to give us a place of dominion. Always we exercise that dominion on behalf of the creator. Always we strive to be faithful to the creator’s wishes, as best we can know them.

We will inevitably have differences as we strive to discern what God would have us do. It is vital, though, that we ask the right question. In this case the right question will never focus on a first person pronoun. The correct questions are not, “What do I want?” or “How can we use the environment to get what we want?” Rather, the right question will always have God and creation at the center. These questions will be “What would God have me do?”, and “What would best serve the creation that God has entrusted into my care?”

FRIENDS of Luther Seminary Visual Art Exhibit

- Visual artists in the Luther Seminary community (Students, staff, faculty, emeriti) are invited to submit art for an exhibit April 15 & 16, 2011. 2 pieces per artist allowed. Deadline for declaring interest is April 1, 2011
- FRIENDS of Luther Seminary is dedicated to support the students, staff and faculty in prayer. The FRIENDS Endowed scholarship supports 3 students annually.
- FRIENDS Annual Spring Brunch and program is April 16, 2011 featuring the work of Lucy Rose Fisher who paints on glass.



Next month ... **ECUMENISM**

Have you ever been frustrated that we seem to have so few ecumenical students in our classes? Have you ever been frustrated by the term 'ecumenical student' and want to share your opinions on what title non-Lutherans around Luther Seminary should have? Have you ever been that one ecumenical singled out and stared at in class? What does it even mean to be ecumenical and how is that different or the same as simply being a follower of Christ? We want to hear your thoughts surrounding ecumenism! Articles due Monday, April 4th.

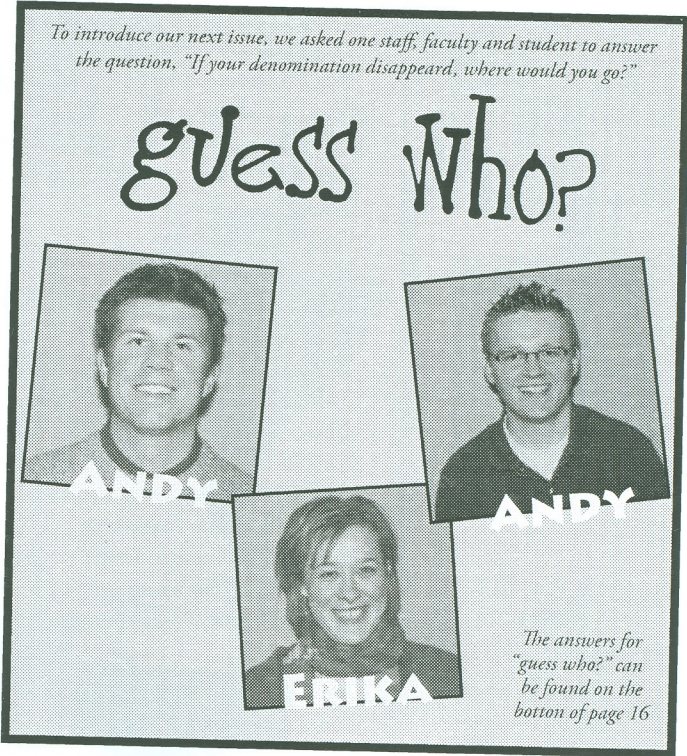
Pay rate is \$15 for articles less than half a page (of Concord space) and \$30 per article a half-page or larger.

I don't think I'm unusual when it comes to my experience with communities of faith, and my experience is a winding road. I spent my childhood in the Missouri Synod (19 years), had high school experiences in a parachurch organization, went to college at an evangelical institution, attended a Baptist mega church in those college years, then worked in a PCUSA church. Like many people of my generation and younger, I think I know what I'm not, but it is not as easy to say what I am. My experience is too diverse. Being a child of these multi-denominational community experiences it is too hard to be put into one single category (sure, we pick a group to get ordained in or whatever, but even then these other experiences are still formative). What this means is that I need to find a theological identity (more than a denominational one); I need to work out my theology, drawing from multiple experiences and perspectives. I describe myself as Lutheran and not Lutheran, Presbyterian and not Presbyterian. I think institutions like Luther need to attend to this reality and avoid easy categories, categories people my age and younger feel fail to fully describe us (like "ecumenical"). And finally, if you need more to figure out who I am, I wrote this on my iPhone during the last all-community forum.

3 If my denomination disappeared, what would I do? My first inclination would be to pull a Chicken Little; "Help the church is falling, we have to tell the bishop!" Oh, wait. Shoot. The next natural sanctuary spot, where the Spirit still moves and there exists a denominational aftertaste, would be some scenic Bible Camp or retreat center. After a time spent escaping from the world, I would have to admit that the church needs to be in the world for the hope and healing of the world. So, maybe I would find a denominational home somewhere else, and I would learn to love deeply the traditions which my other brothers and sisters in Christ do also. Or maybe I would just set up a dialogue for people to come together; in an art studio, a coffee shop, a bar (gasp!), a mall food court, a chat-room-type website, a homeless shelter, or in a home and celebrate how we are church together listening to the cries and needs of common people immersed in a broken world. Maybe in the meantime, where one or more are gathered together in ordinary spaces, the Spirit may show up and the Gospel could be rightly proclaimed. Perhaps we can do that before the denomination dies.

2 My original reason for being a respondent was to trick people into thinking I'm Andy Root. I even made an agreement with the Concord that I would only write if he agreed to it as well. Thinking he'd never do it, I figured I was safe. Then, to my surprise, I received an email with this issue's question and Dr. Root's response. As it turns out, there is no arrangement of the words relationships and despair mixed with a Bonhoeffer reference and the term "existentialism"

that would be more obviously Root than what he wrote, even if I – attempting to write like the hip theologian and pop-culture enthusiast – used as many commas as possible, since I've all but stated that I am not Andy Root (or am I?), here is my response... as someone who has hit for the Lutheran cycle (baptized, confirmed, graduated and employed by Lutheran churches and schools), I'm embarrassed to admit I hardly knew what it meant to be Lutheran (theologically) until I went to seminary. Today, my biggest issues



in liking a church are the preaching and the community. Put simply, I don't want to spend time with a bunch of people who aren't being themselves (including the pastor) or listen to sermons I could have come up with in five hours at a coffee shop. I also heard a quote recently that might help explain my position, it went something like this, "some churches try to make an hour feel like 10 minutes, but I'm looking for a church that makes an hour last for seven days."

The Concord asks...

What are you not giving up for Lent?



"March Madness"
—David Purcell, '09

"Procrastination"
—Kendall Jeske,
MA Senior



"Jesus? Is... is the answer Jesus?"
—Eric Clapp,
PLTS Consortium
Student

"Peanut Butter and Jelly Sandwiches"
—Will Johnson,
MDiv Junior



"Humble Pie--All other sweets are on the list"
—Rebecca Mehl,
MDiv Middler

"Religion and Diet Coke. If I gave up Diet Coke I'd have to give up leadership in my religion."

—Natalie Gessert, '09



DOWN The hill

The Seminary through younger eyes

By Scott Simmons and daughter Elise

Scott Simmons is a MDiv Intern at Westwood Lutheran, St. Louis Park

The other day, Elise and her dad, Scott Simmons, sat down to talk about God's creation.

Scott: So Elise, why do you think it is important to care for God's creation?

Elise: Because God created us and he cares about creation.

Scott: That's right. So how does God care for creation?

Elise: God is there...

Scott: God is here?

Elise: Yes, God is here whenever we feel frustrated and whenever we feel uncomfortable and whenever we feel scared or lonely and we don't have anybody else to be there... God cares for creation that way by being there and being with us.

Scott: I like that... so, what do you think God's creation is?

Elise: It's stuff that he made... like trees, food, fruit, people, animals, fish, living plants, dirt, roads. He made cement, in a way... he makes stuff with people and he helps them make stuff. Some people think he's helping them, that he's doing the construction work, but actually he helps our muscles, and brains, and makes our body feel better... he heals your bones and stuff. He heals everything, even if your heart feels weird. He's with you in the hospital and if you die, you can live with him forever.

Scott: So, what you're saying is that God created everything that is, right? And God is here with us at all times?

Elise: Yes.

Scott: And also when we build things like roads and houses, we help God create by using things...

Elise: Like tools, and love, and stuff.

Scott: Love is a wonderful tool. So how we can use it to care for the earth?

Elise: By recycling stuff, by not throwing things in the mud, or putting plastic bags in the river so the animals won't swallow them and get sick and die. And God will help us make sure we don't do bad things to creation, but if we do God will always forgive us.

Scott: Good point. Don't we also help care for God's creation in the way we use things... by using only what we need?

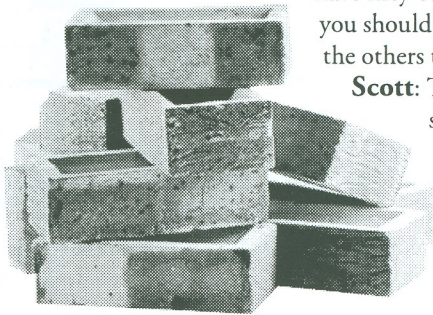
Elise: I know... like if you need to use 3000 bricks to make a building, but you have fifty-two-thousand-hundred bricks, than you should only use the 3000 you need and give the others to somebody else who needs a home.

Scott: That's right. I don't think I could have said it better myself. So, do you have any extra bricks I can have.

Elise: No

Scott: But if you did?

Elise: I'd share them with you.



Answers to 'Guess Who' on page 15 - 1. Andy Root, Associate Prof. of Youth and Family Ministry; 2. Andy Jolivett, Associate Director of Admissions; 3. Erika Benson, MA Junior